

lived in those times, had we lived in the 18th century, hopefully we would have been beyond our time, or in the 19th century hopefully beyond our time, or in the 20th century hopefully beyond our time, as Martin Luther King, Jr., urged us to be.

We serve now in the 21st century, and we know that there are those in America and throughout the world who preach hate against a class of people not because of their actions, not because of their character, but because of who they are. That is what this vote is about today.

Through this legislation, the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, the Members of this body will make a strong statement in favor of values that unite us as Americans: tolerance, respect for our differences, and justice and accountability for those who perpetrate violent acts against others.

It has been too recent that lynching was rationalized in our country. It is too present in today's society that some across the sea and, yes, some here rationalize violence because of membership in another class different than they. It is long past time to bring the existing Federal hate crimes law, which was enacted nearly 40 years ago, into the 21st century. Under existing law, Federal jurisdiction over hate crimes is limited to those acts directed at individuals on the basis of race, religion, color, or national origin.

Let me say something about that to my friends. We have come to accept in America in the 21st century that it is not respectable nor acceptable to be bigoted against those who are black, be bigoted against those who are women, be bigoted against those who are Catholic or Baptist or Jews or Muslims. It is not respectable. It is not acceptable. You don't talk about that in the restaurant anymore.

But there is a class in America that is still respectable, rationalized many times by faith. But then segregation was rationalized for faith-based reasons.

My friends, this is an important vote of conscience, of a statement of what America is, a society that understands that we accept differences. We may not agree with those differences, but we know if society is to be free that we must accept differences.

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That is the bedrock of what America means, not just to us, but to all the world.

And so today, my friends, I say we have an important statement to make, not a bill to pass, but a statement to make about the values of our country.

I had a prepared statement here, I won't read the balance of it. But I hope that every Member has the courage and the perspective, that when they rise from their bed 20 years from now, they will be able to say, unlike some of our predecessors in centuries past who failed the test of tolerance, to say that

we had the courage to live out the principles that makes America such a wonderful, great, decent and just Nation.

Vote for this bill. Vote for our principles. Vote for your faith that teaches that we reach out to lift up and to love. Vote for this bill.

Mr. Speaker, today, through this legislation—"The Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act"—the Members of this body will make a strong statement in favor of values that unite us as Americans: tolerance, respect for our differences, and justice and accountability for those who perpetrate violent acts against others.

It is long past time to bring the existing Federal hate crimes law, which was enacted nearly 40 years ago, into the 21st century.

Under existing law, Federal jurisdiction over hate crimes is limited to those acts directed at individuals on the basis of race, religion, color or national origin and only when the victim is targeted because he or she is engaged in a Federally protected activity, such as voting.

This legislation broadens this provision to cover all violent crimes motivated by race, religion, or national origin, when the defendant causes bodily injury or attempts to cause bodily injury.

Furthermore, the bill expands current law to prohibit the same conduct, if such conduct is motivated on the basis of the victim's gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability.

Mr. Speaker, the fact is, the Federal Government has long had a history of combating crimes based on prejudice.

This bill simply expands the current law to groups that historically have been affected by violence and thus it responds to the reality in America today.

According to the FBI, race ranks first among motivations for hate crimes and sexual orientation ranks second among the reasons that people are targeted.

Some people ask: Why is this legislation even necessary?

To them, I answer: because brutal hate crimes motivated by race, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation and identity or disability not only injure individual victims, but also terrorize entire segments of our population and tear at our Nation's social fabric.

Let us be clear: This legislation does not affect free speech, or punish beliefs or thoughts. It only seeks to punish violent acts.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, this bill would allow the Federal Government to provide assistance to State and local law enforcement officials to investigate and prosecute hate crimes, and would clarify the conditions under which such crimes could be federally investigated and prosecuted.

Enacting these important additions to current law will send a very powerful message that crimes committed against any American—just because of who he or she is—are absolutely unacceptable.

Not surprisingly, this legislation is supported by 31 State attorneys general, and more than 280 national law enforcement, professional, education, civil rights, religious and civic organizations, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National District Attorneys Association and the National Sheriffs Association.

I urge my colleagues: Vote for this legislation, not only because it is important and nec-

essary but also because it is the right thing to do.

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor now to recognize the Speaker of the House, Ms. NANCY PELOSI, for 1 minute.

Ms. PELOSI. I thank the distinguished chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Mr. CONYERS, for yielding time, but more importantly, for bringing this important legislation to the floor in his ongoing, long commitment to justice in our country. And I want to commend Congresswoman TAMMY BALDWIN and Chairman BARNEY FRANK for their leadership. It is an honor to call you colleague. Thank you for giving us the opportunity today to make America more American.

Every day we come to this floor, we honor the tradition of our Founders, that every person is created equal, and that we are all God's children. Every day that we come to this floor, we pledge allegiance to the flag, and at the end of that pledge we say "with liberty and justice for all." That is what today is about. Because in the preamble to the Constitution, which we take an oath to, we talk about forming a more perfect union. Our Founders knew that our Constitution had to be amended. They knew that we had to move to a more perfect union in terms of legislation to reflect the values of our country. And so we are here today to extend to the hate crimes legislation others who have had hate crimes committed against them. The record is clear.

What I am so interested in is the fact that so many law enforcement organizations have endorsed this legislation. My colleagues have spoken very eloquently as to why this is about the values of our country. They have spoken very clearly about the need for this legislation. And if it has been said, I think it bears repeating that the law enforcement organizations, many of them, including the International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National District Attorneys Association, the National Sheriffs Association, the Police Executive Research Forum, as well as nearly 30 attorney generals across the country, support need for Federal hate crime legislation. They are joined by more than 230 civil rights, education, religious and civic organizations who have voiced their support. Let us be clear that this Congress, this House of Representatives, have heard their call.

Hate crimes, as have been said, have no place in America, no place where we pledge every morning "with liberty and justice for all." We must act to end hate crimes and save lives.

Mr. Speaker, the legislation will help prevent bias-motivated violence based on religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, national origin or disability, while respecting the first amendment rights of free speech and religious expression. It increases the ability of State, local and Federal law enforcement agencies to solve a wide range of violent hate crimes.